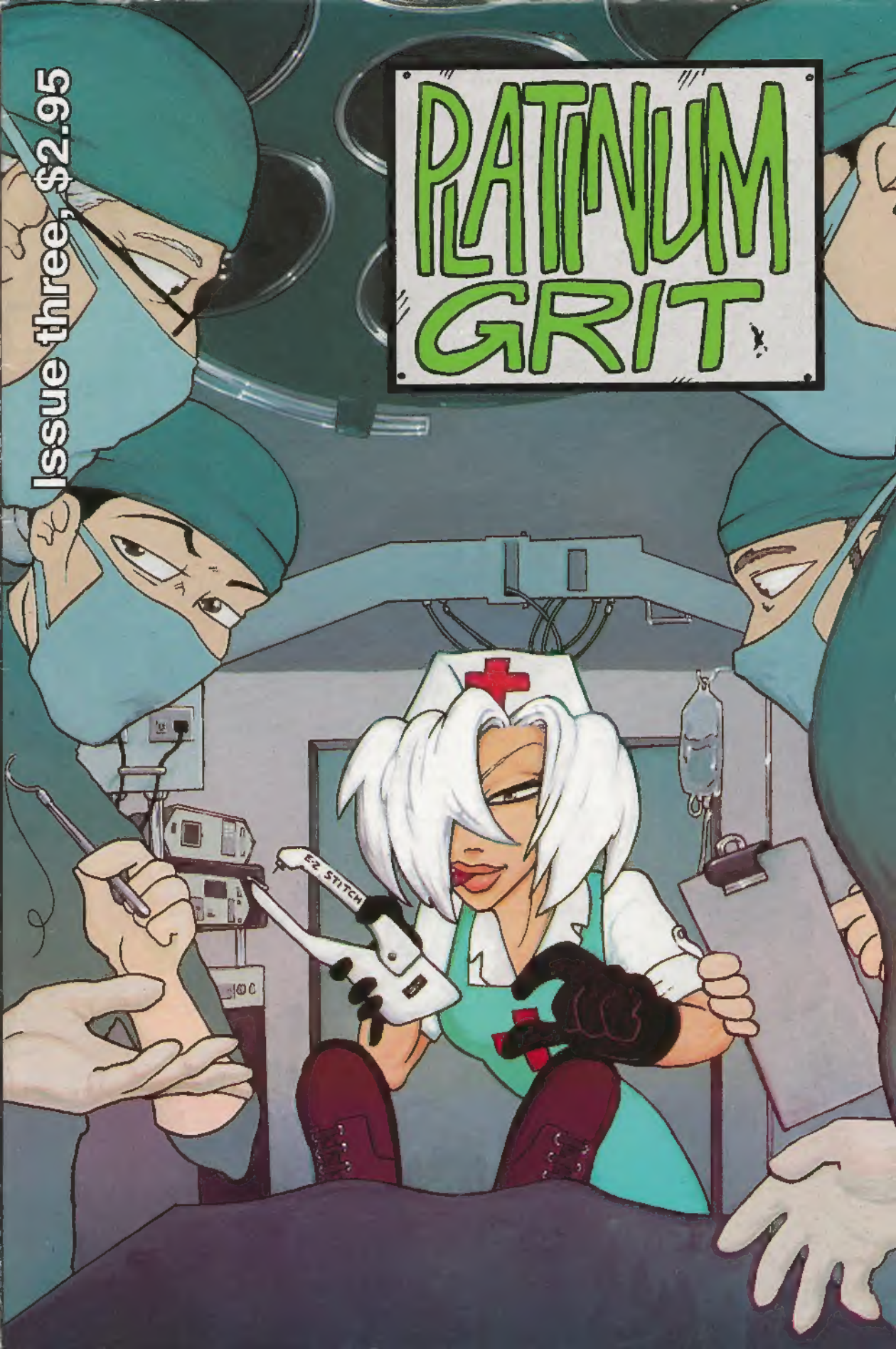

PLATINUM GRIT
Issue three, $2.95
EZ STITCH

PROLOGUE.

COME ON, COME ON – SCHNELL!

IS THIS EVERYTHING?

ACH!

THE REST'S ALL IN THE SKIP.

TWINGES, JER?

NO. AND I DON'T NEED A DOCTOR.

WUSS. MAYBE YOU SHOULD GET SOME REAL BANDAGES.

GAFF'S FINE. WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT... ...YOU KNOW?

ALL TAKEN CARE OF. YOU OWE ME THREE BUCKS.

THREE BUCKS?

I KNOW. FARES WENT UP AGAIN.

"A WEEK IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER"

from the files of Richard "Jack" Leaderboard P.I.

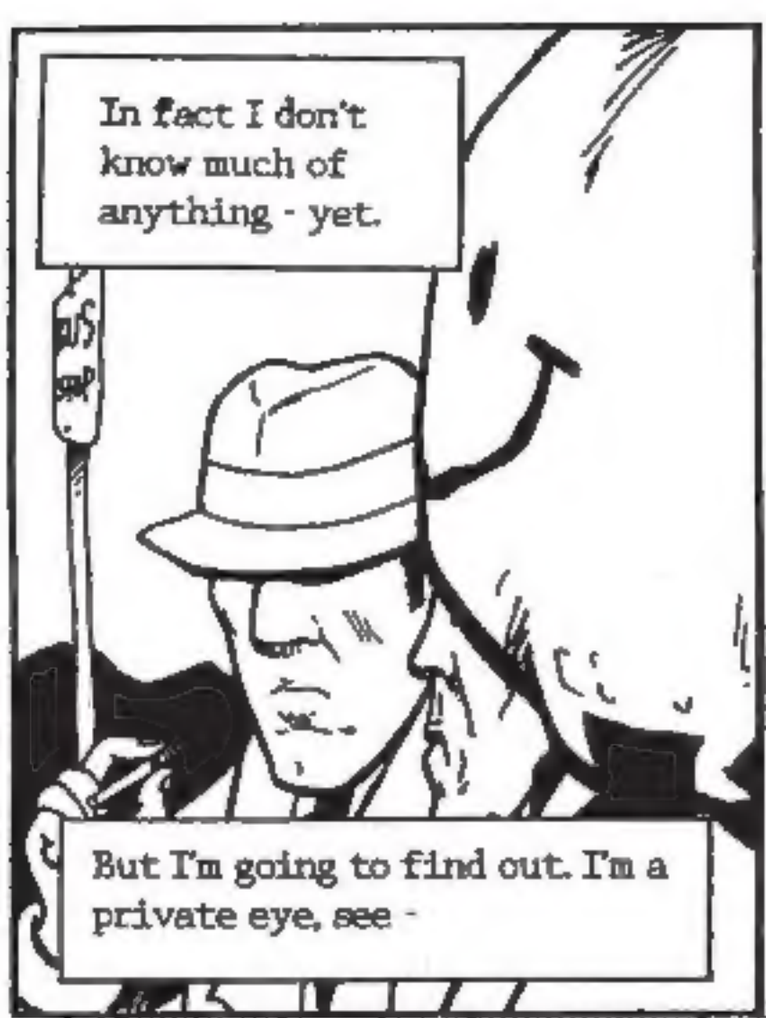
9:33 on a Friday morning.

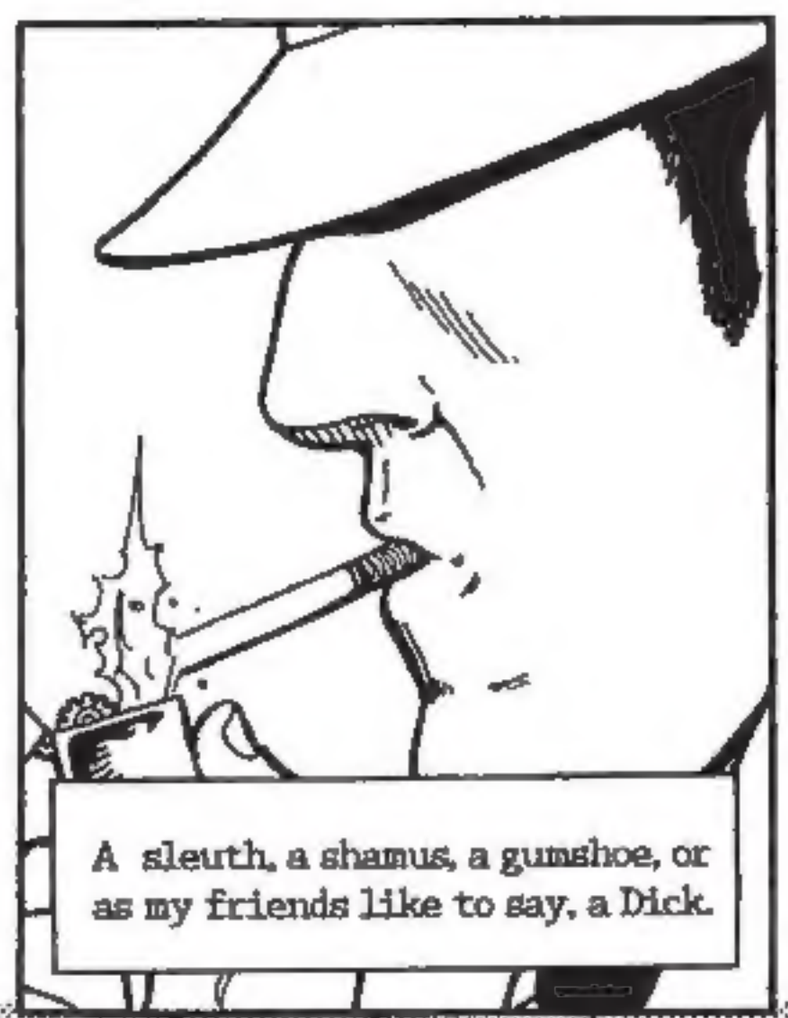
Up 'til now the week's been so slow you could've sung the National Anthem to it.

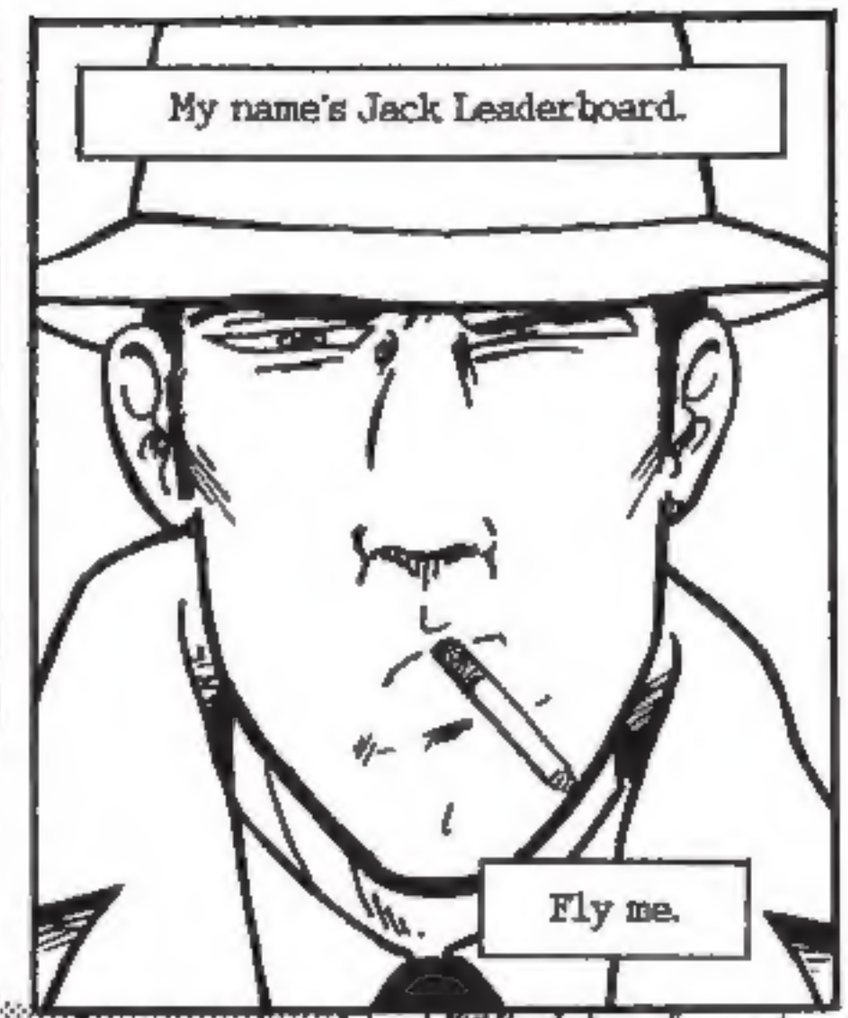
I'm trying to get to work, but the 147 bus is as late as the guy across from me: more than five minutes. When I oh-so-casually check him out, the little detectives' bone at the back of my nose tells me something -

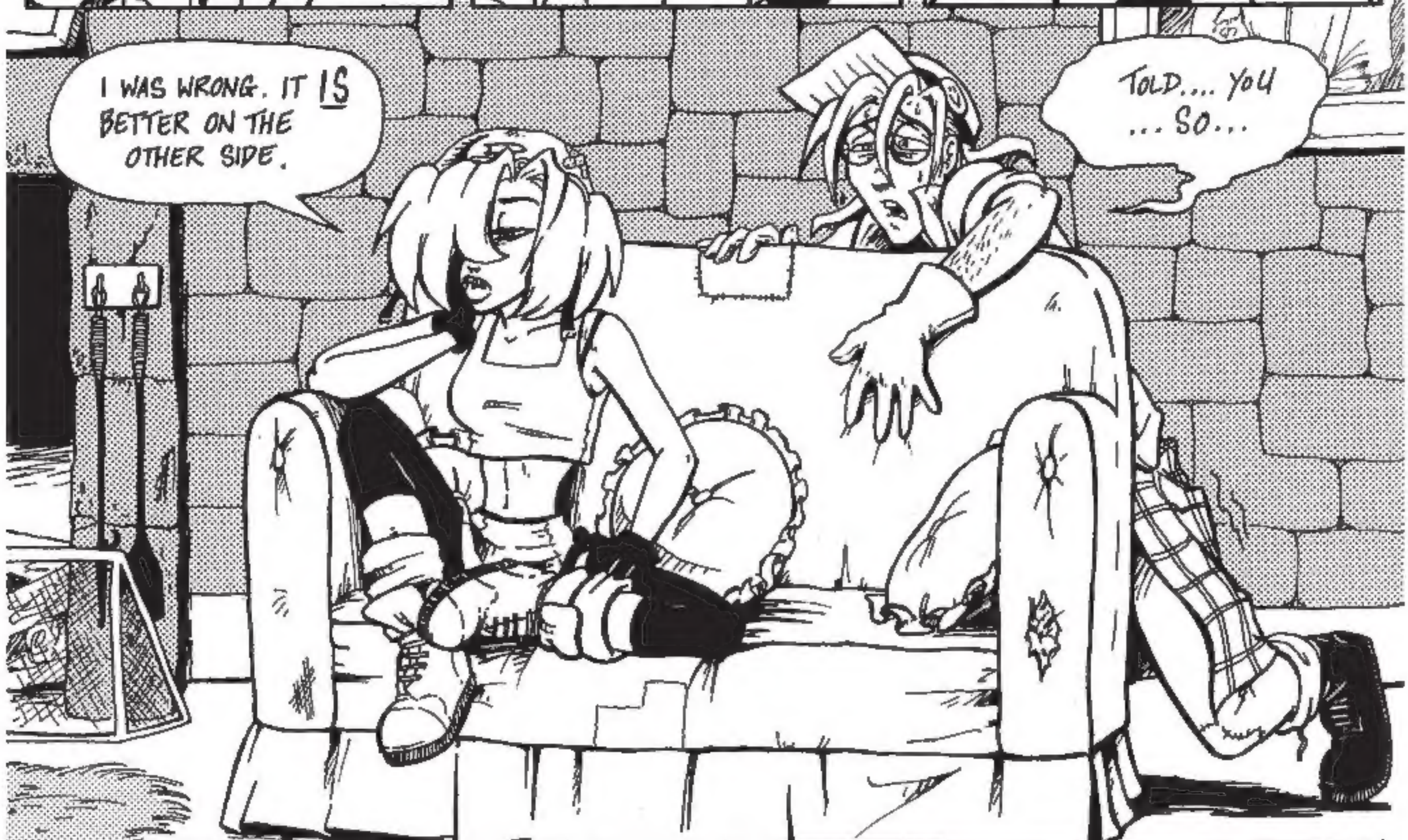
No wonder Mr O'Lantern here can't see straight - his entire head is AWOL. I'm tempted to chalk up the whole thing as an unfortunate shopping accident, until it hits me - that's just what they wanted me to think. They went to a lot of trouble to make this look innocent, but they missed one vital point. There's no Greengrocer's on this bus route.

Right now, I don't know who 'they' are. I don't know what their game is. I don't know why Vegetable Boy's got an all-day bus pass when it's after nine o'clock and an off-peak saver would have done the job.


In fact I don't know much of anything - yet.
But I'm going to find out. I'm a private eye, see -


A sleuth, a shamus, a gumshoe, or as my friends like to say, a Dick.


My name's Jack Leaderboard.
Fly me.


I WAS WRONG. IT IS BETTER ON THE OTHER SIDE.
TOLD.... YOU ... SO...

DON'T PUSH SO FAST! I'M TRYING OUT VIEWS OF THE ROOM.
HOWS...?
SCRRAPE!

MAYBE UNDER THE WINDOW.
JER?

JEREMY?

Friday. 11:17 pm.
I finally got Pumpkinhead onto his bus. Sure, there was trouble, but you can't argue with a multi-trip ticket. I can't, anyway.

I've got Jimmy the Clutch-Pencil Mulrooney running pumpkin samples through the police vegetable spectroscope. But it doesn't take a thumb the colour of a jilted dame's eyes to tell me this is the patch I'm looking for.

JEREMY? STOP BLEEDING AND SPEAK TO ME.

Besides, like any chessplayer worth his clock, I've always had a thing for castles.

12:56 pm.

I'M GOING TO COUNT TO TEN....

This Founding STANE wa Laid By Guid Queen Mary hersel.

SAE THERE.

This place is old. Real old. And like me, it's no stranger to corpses.

WAILL YE NOO SUNG AULD LANG SYNE FURR MEE?

FOR DE LAST TIME MON, I'M NAHT ROBERT BURNS!

In fact, there's a graveyard full of spare parts, and one of them hasn't stopped moving yet.

NAE THUNN, U'LL NAIRR SPAKE A WURRD AGIN JURRAMEE – 'TWUZ A SAIR FECHT, AN' PUIR DOUGAL HUDD ET COOMIN', FERR AW' THUT. AH JUIST HAWP THAYURR SELLERBRAITIN' PRAWPER! UZ YE KEN, THAYURR'S NAE BAIRNS WHIRR THAYURR'S NAE NUKIE! T'WUDD BAY GUDE TAE WORCH, AN' BAY SHURE O' TH' BAWNKUN', BOOT AH'LL BAY DEED AN' GORRUN ERE THAY'RR AWEE... AN' MEBBE THART'S UZ UT SHOOD BAY. R'GRRAITS URR FER QUEANS, D'YE FAWLLUW?

THANK YOU MA'AM. THAT'S VERY .... HELPFUL.

UN FAICT AH DINNAE KEN WHAY AH'M NORT DEED TH' NOO!

QUITE.

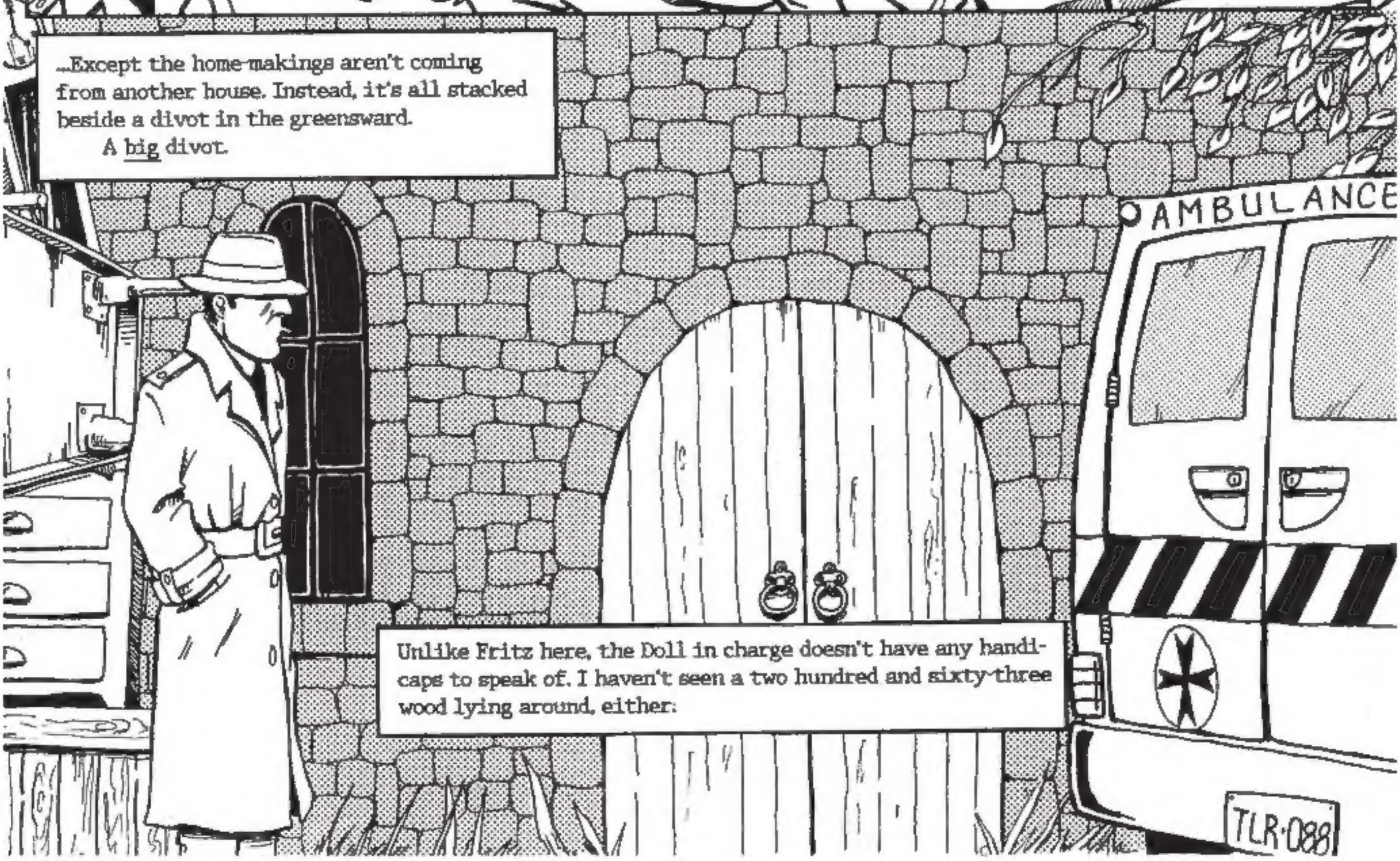
Furniture. Bodies. Jamaican accents. There's a link here somewhere. I can feel it.

ACH, SHTRÜDEL! SUDDLE TIMPTRHEZ OF DZER WALDVIERTEL!

An oddball three-some has been moving furniture all day. Nothing strange about that...

...Except the home-makings aren't coming from another house. Instead, it's all stacked beside a divot in the greensward.

A big divot.



Unlike Fritz here, the Doll in charge doesn't have any handicaps to speak of. I haven't seen a two hundred and sixty-three wood lying around, either.

TLR·088

Scottish or not, my guess is - they're no golfers.

LOOK AFTER YOUNG MASTER JEREMY, WON'T YOU? REMEMBER: NO EXCITEMENT. AND CALL ME IF HE HAS A RELAPSE.

I WILL. GO AWAY NOW.

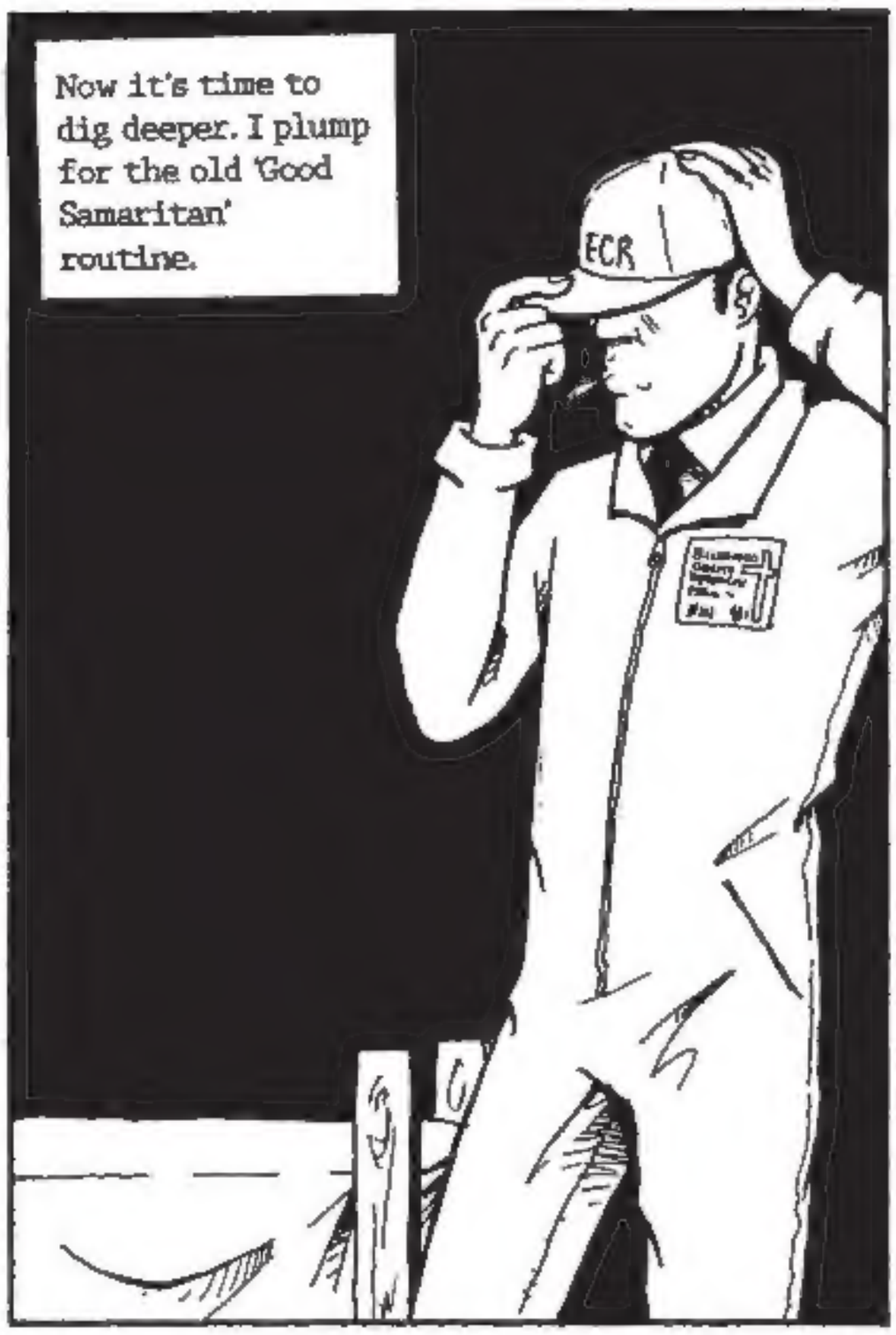
Sunday. 8.30 am. With a little encouragement, the Doctor told me that one of the three ~~weirdos~~ suspects has managed to slice a hole right through himself while moving a couch.

That's what happens when you leave a kid to do a man's job.

Speaking of kids, Jimmy the Clutch-Pencil Mulrooney found traces of gaffer-tape at the base of the pumpkin. He thinks it was there to hold the thing on. The sap. A quick check of the local hardware dives turned up bulk sales to "a young couple who've just moved into the castle behind bus stop thirty-seven."

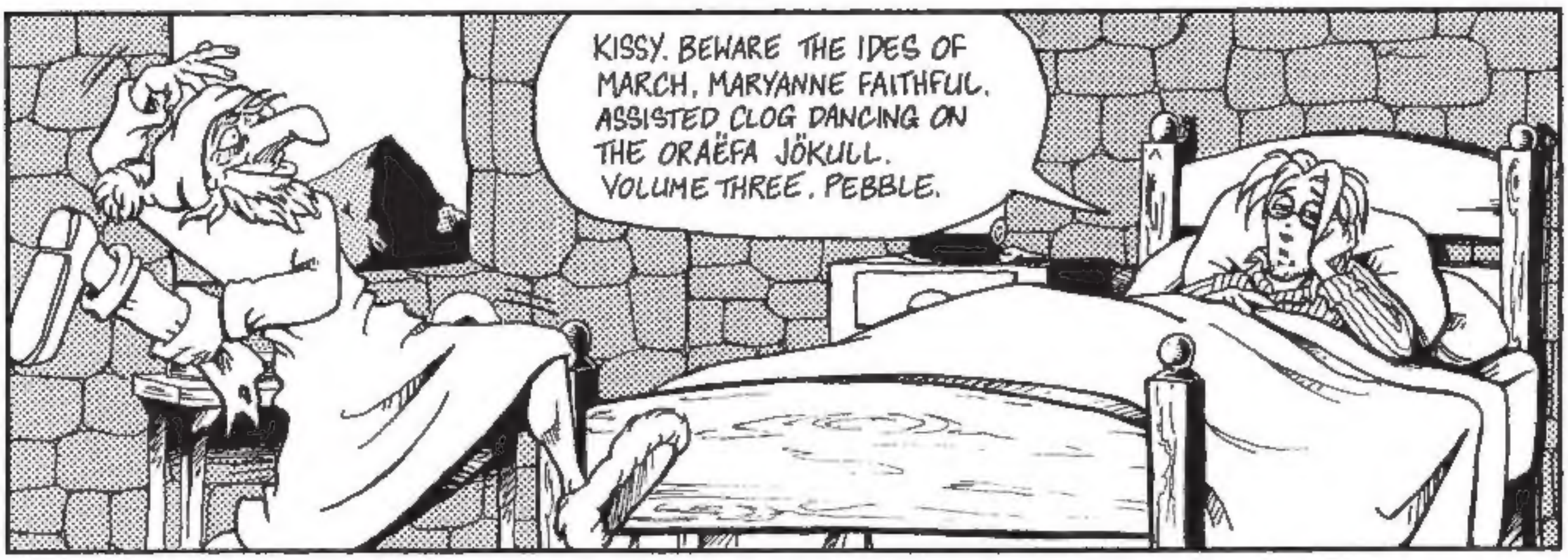
Paydirt.

ECCLESIASTICAL CHARITY REMOVALIST FINALS '94 OPEN DIVISION


Now it's time to dig deeper. I plump for the old 'Good Samaritan' routine.
ECR

NOT BAD. NOT BAD AT ALL.
There are no atheists on Moving Day.

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR?
NEIN! NEIN!


KISSY. BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH. MARYANNE FAITHFUL. ASSISTED CLOG DANCING ON THE ORAËFA JÖKULL. VOLUME THREE. PEBBLE.

CHOO VONNA HINT?
HEI'M DZER BOTSDEN STRRHENGYULER.

THE BOSTON STRANGLER?

BINKO!

ZIEGFRIED. MOUNTAIN GOAT.
ACH!
THANKS.
S'OKAY. ARE YOU BETTER YET?
NOT REALLY.
HMM. WILL YOU BE BETTER BY.....TONIGHT?
NO...
IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS!! WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG!?
I'M HEALING AS FAST AS I CAN!
NOT GOOD ENOUGH, JER.

I'M TAKING OVER.

DON'T GET EXCITED.

UH....

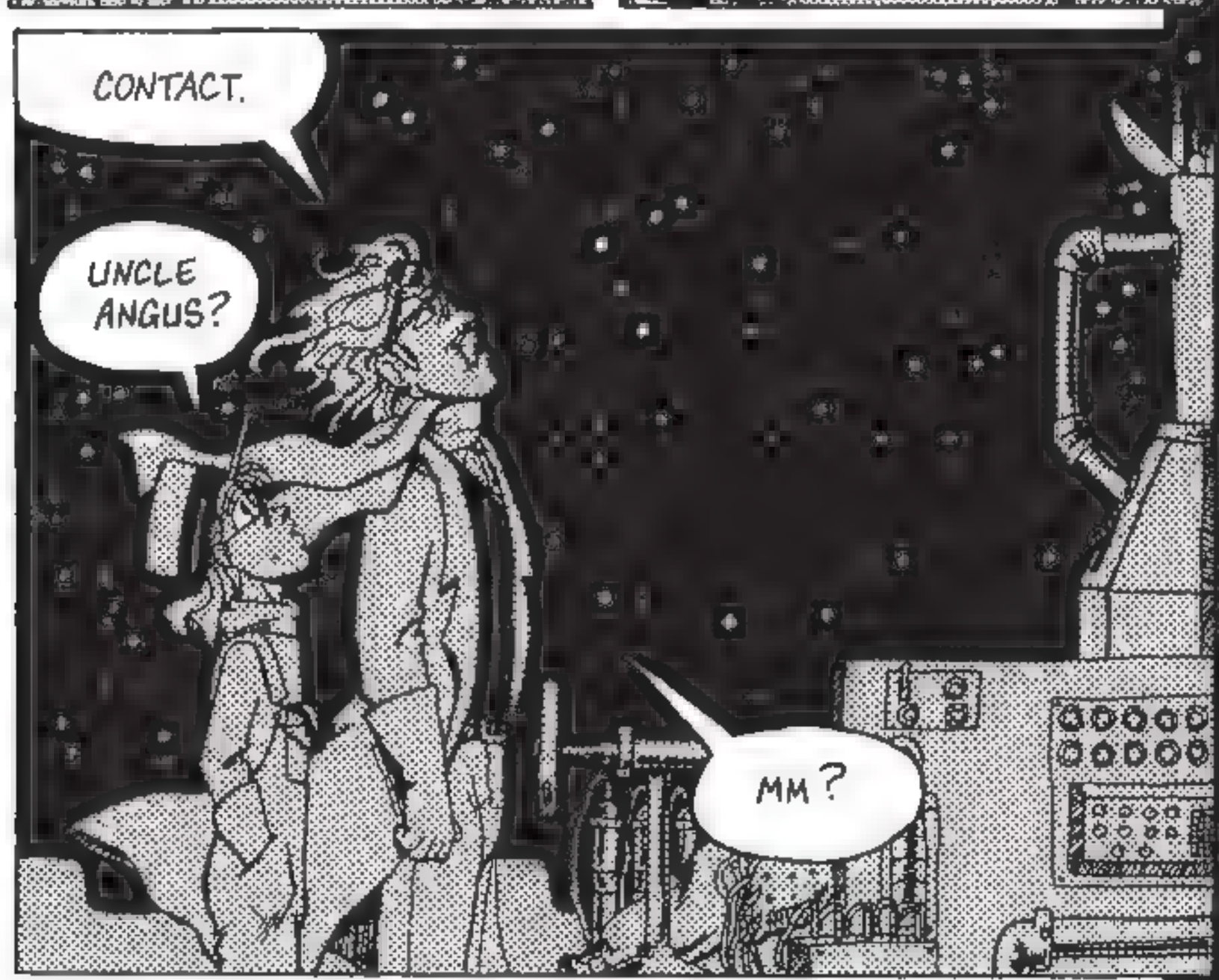
WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

WE'RE TRYING TO BROADCAST A SIMPLE FIBONACCI SEQUENCE FIRST, TO LET THEM KNOW WE'RE INTELLIGENT. FOR THAT WE JUST RUN A FEW MILLION VOLTS THROUGH A BRANCHING SUPERCONDUCTOR.

PASS THE BROCCOLI, WOULD YOU JEREMY?

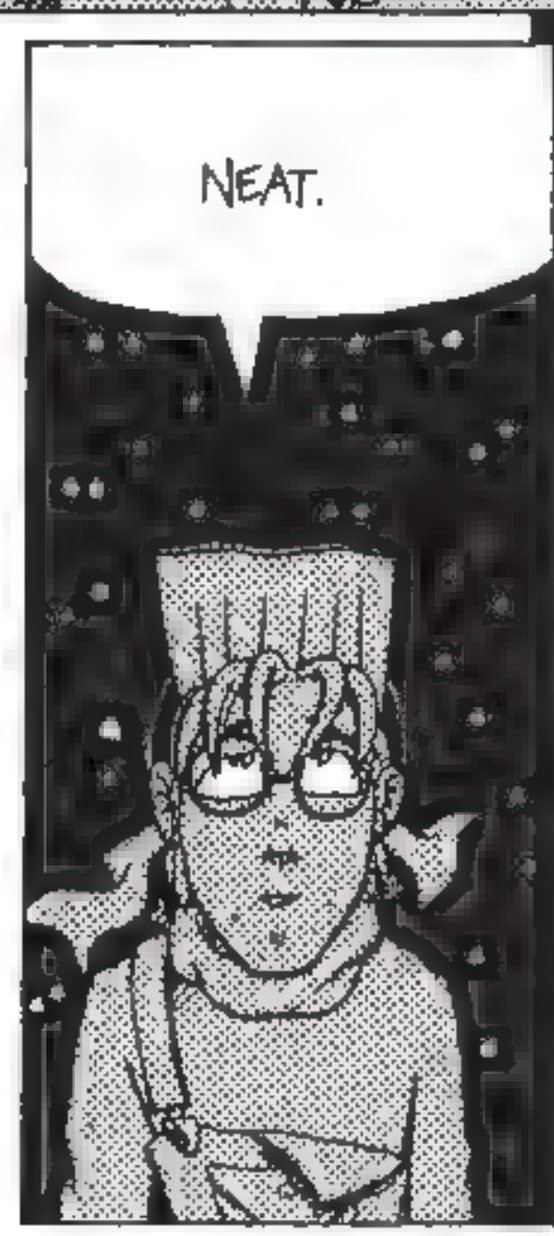
READY?

BZZZT


CONTACT.
UNCLE ANGUS?
MM?

CAN YOU SEND ANY MESSAGE AT ALL? AND THEY'LL UNDERSTAND IT?

WE CAN SAY WHAT WE LIKE, LADDIE. ANY CODE CAN BE DECIPHERED EVENTUALLY.


NEAT.

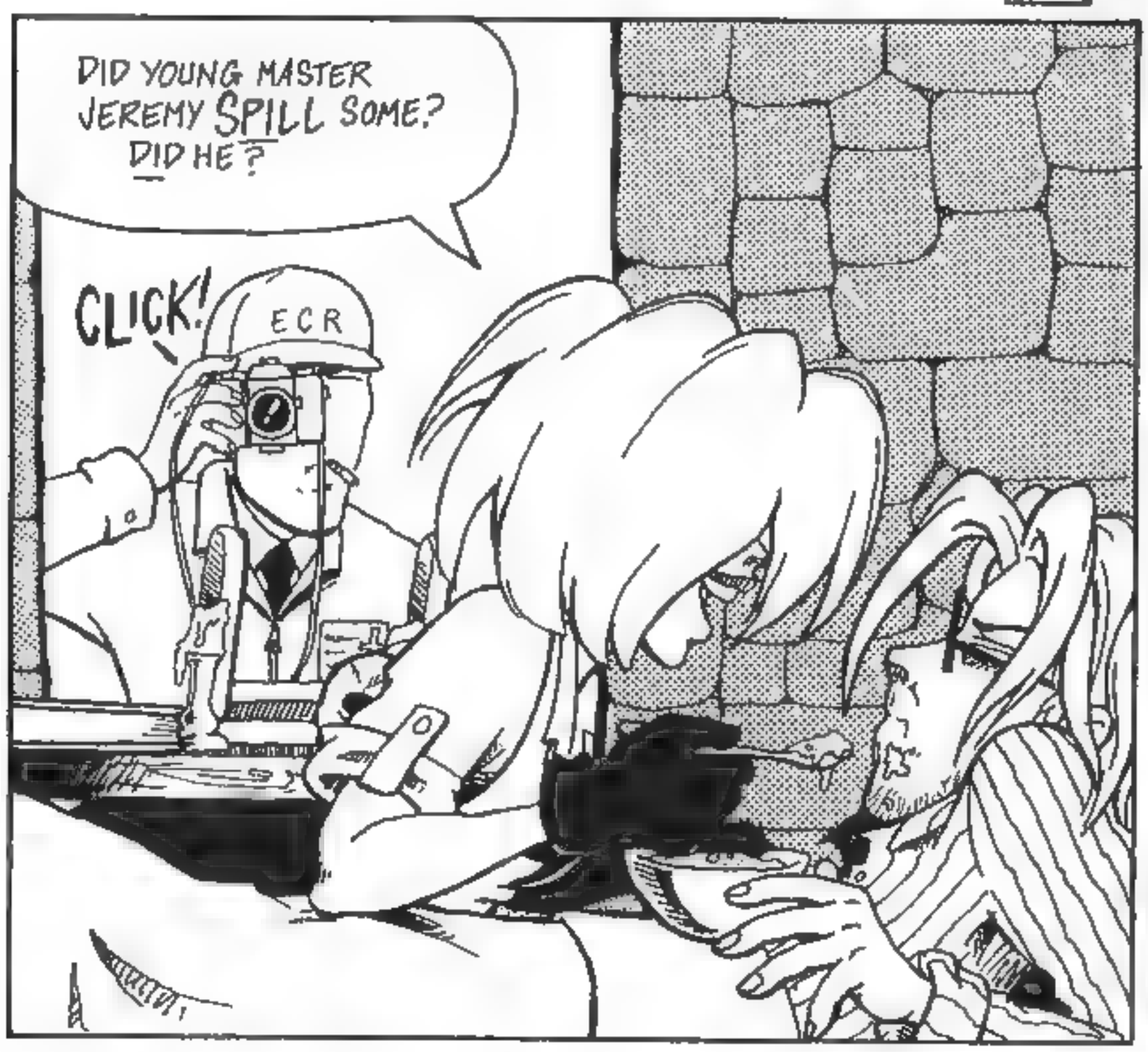
Saturday. 11:26 am. Inside at last.
Ranged around this castle is enough medieval cutlery to keep a very big chef away from the sink for months. Festival months. Could one of these be the murder weapon?
Somehow, that just seems too easy. I don't know what I'm looking for -

But this drawerful of live oysters comes pretty damn close.

Subject: Nilson Maria Theresa Kerr. Female. Caucasian. 20 years old. Female. Reported missing by her parents at age 8, after a trip to Sea World. Female. Dame. Babycakes.

Put enough oysters in a confined space and they start to piss each other off. Annoying oysters is how you make pearls. And where there's pearls, there's swine.
Time to meet my hosts.

Subject: Jeremy Lachlan MacConnor. Caucasian. 22 years old. No criminal record. Reported his parents missing at age 11. (Investigation suspended at his parents' request.)



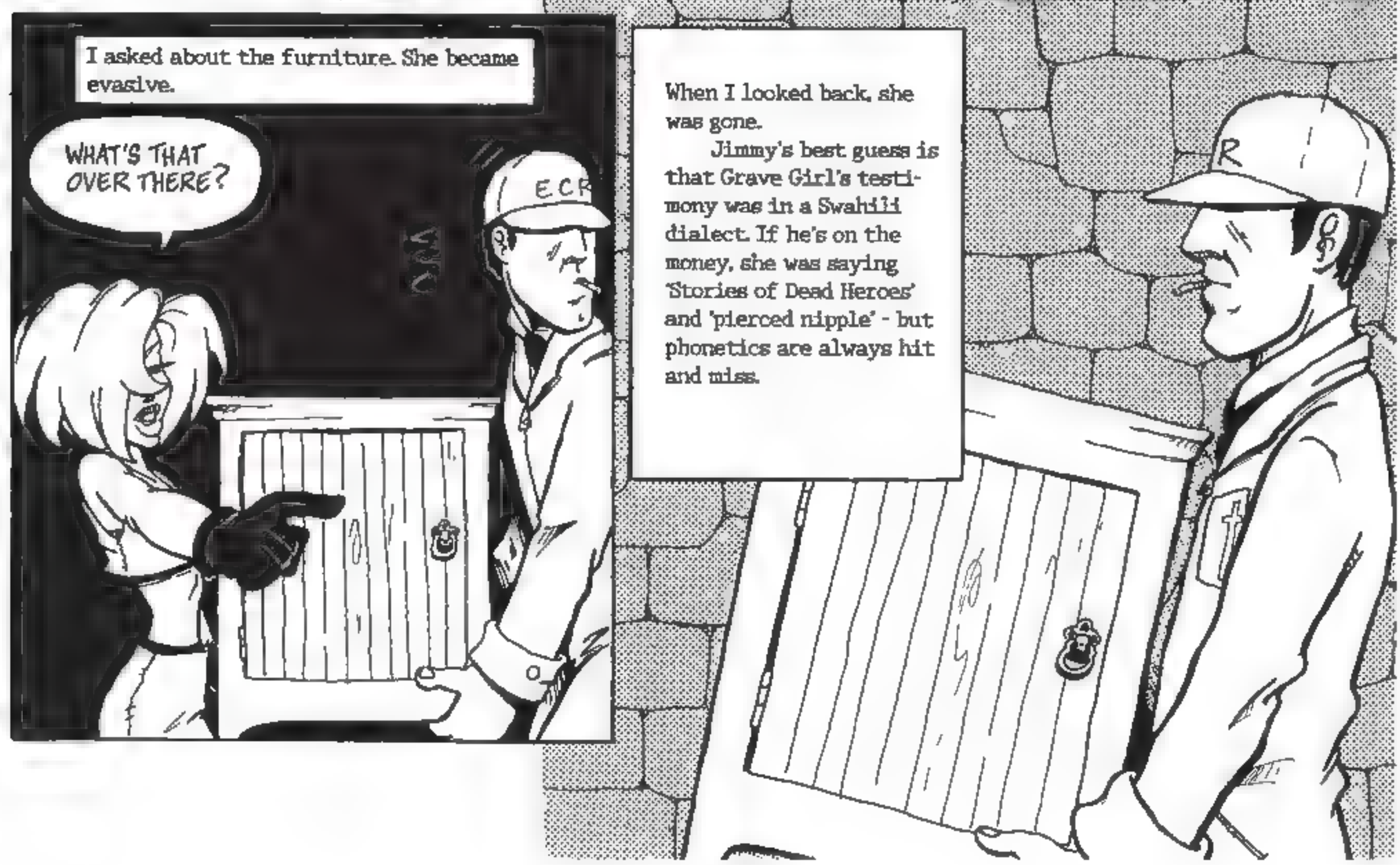
Caught in the act. Play it cool.
ECR
HULLO BABY. PHOTOGRAPHY'S A HOBBY OF MINE.

PUSH!
Jimmy turned up the Last Will and Testament of one Lotte MacConnor. Seems her only beneficiary was the couch patsy upstairs, unless he suddenly and violently bites the big one; in which case the whole shebang goes to someone called 'Cousin Dougal.'
The Will also says Lotte owned the castle since 1926. Except the 1's missing. And if there's one thing I can't stand, it's sloppy typing.

But revenge can wait. Right now, I've got an appointment with a dame who makes Bergman look like a fat old film director. Maybe she knows how the Chesterfield Kid really took his licks.

TWISTER.
PRETTY SERIOUS INJURIES, FOR A PARTY GAME.
JER BROKE A LEG PLAYING 'BOGGLE' ONCE.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU PLAY ROUGH.
YOU WOULDN'T BE BUILDIN' A CASE AROUND ME, WOULD YOU MISTER?


I asked about the furniture. She became evasive.
WHAT'S THAT OVER THERE?
ECR
When I looked back, she was gone.
Jimmy's best guess is that Grave Girl's testimony was in a Swahili dialect. If he's on the money, she was saying 'Stories of Dead Heroes' and 'pierced nipple' - but phonetics are always hit and miss.
R

This whole case is like a chocolate jigsaw puzzle: it's messy, it sticks to your fingers, and you don't know whether to fit the pieces together or just take a big bite.

Am becoming incoherent. Must get more bromide.

HULLO BABY.

She had a voice like deep-fried honey and her body was a relief map covered in bullseyes.

YOU'RE A BEAUTIFUL DOLL.

AND YOU'RE A DANGEROUS DICK.

YOU'RE NOT FRIGHTENED ARE YOU BABY?

ONLY OF SCARY THINGS.

LIKE ME?

WE'VE ONLY JUST MET.

YOU'RE A FUNNY GIRL, DOLLFACE.

I LOSE A LOT IN THE TRANSLATION.

SO WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF I KISSED YOU?

RETCH.

DON'T CALL ME THAT.

WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM?

I'M THROUGH WITH THINKING.

DO YOU WANT TO HAVE SEX?

I'VE ALREADY GOT ONE.

OKAY.

That's better.

NOW, THE PARTY'S TONIGHT...

TONIGHT?

SO I'VE GOT TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE ALL BETTER, AND PROPERLY PRESENTABLE.

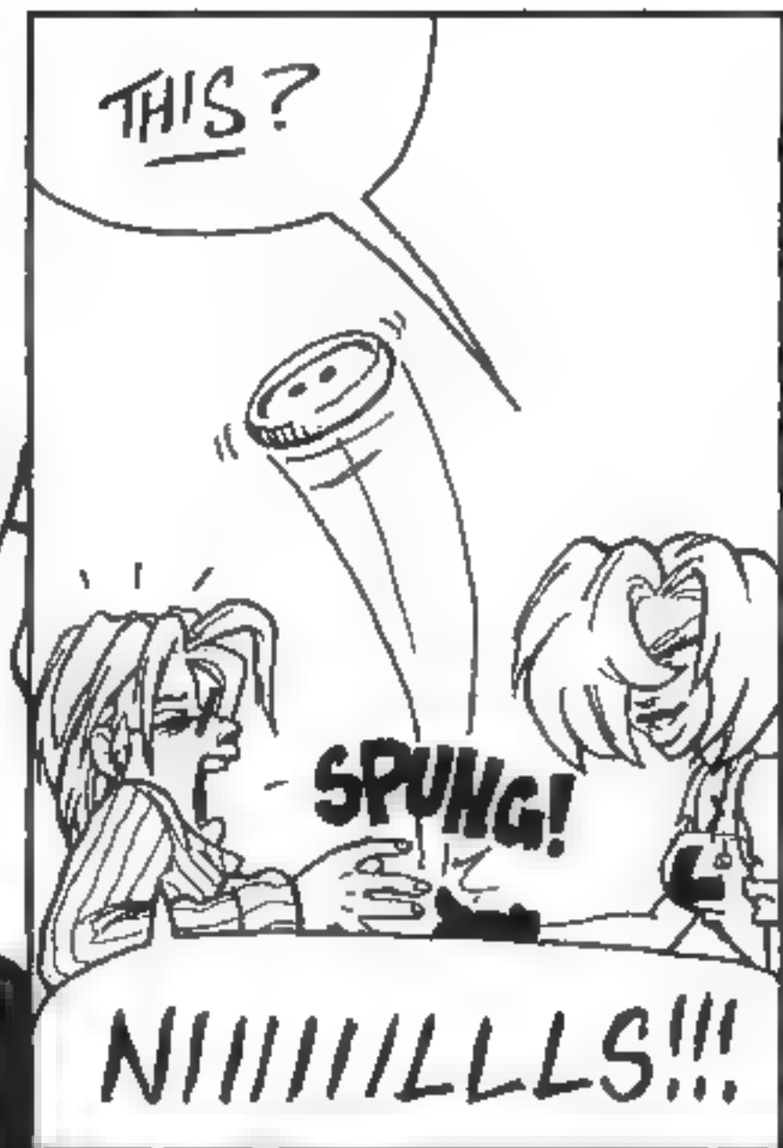
BUT IF I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO GET UP.....

SPONGE BATH.

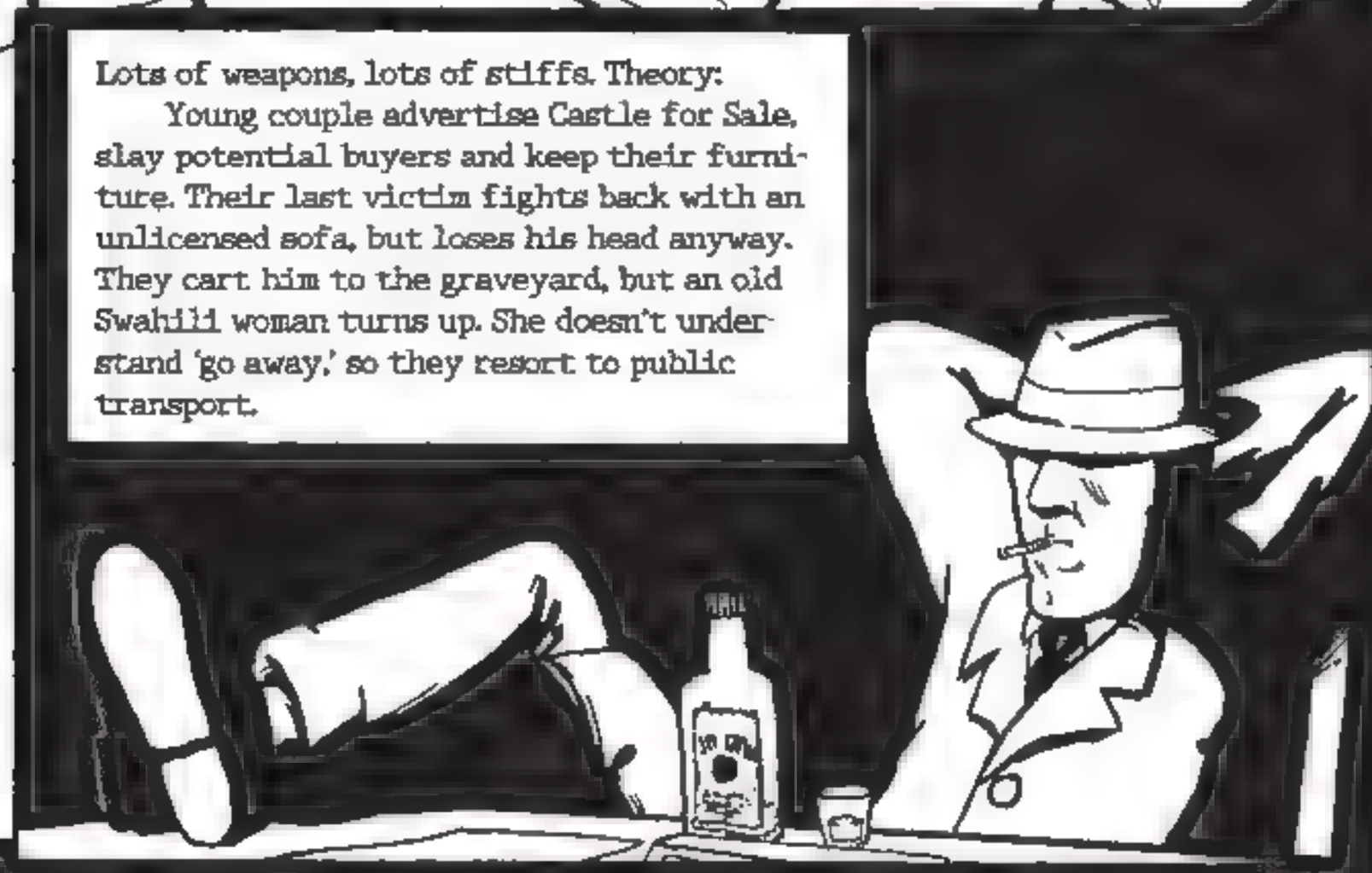
Ice cream I like ice cream. It8s ood. I THink the on your type writer is missing. It worked then thou h. GGgggG gGgGGgg gGgG GGG gg gG GGG GggG GGg. Sorry. g

Tuesday. Early. Woken from a suspiciously sound sleep to find this message. A code? Who is 'g'? Geremy?

If I'm going to crack this case I'll have to spend less time moving furniture.



Lots of weapons, lots of stiffs. Theory:
Young couple advertise Castle for Sale, slay potential buyers and keep their furniture. Their last victim fights back with an unlicensed sofa, but loses his head anyway. They cart him to the graveyard, but an old Swahili woman turns up. She doesn't understand 'go away,' so they resort to public transport.



Sure, it all fits. It's seamless.
If you buy Dollface as a killer.

Pierced nipple? I'd know soon enough.

SHIT.

RIP!

AND THIS AND THIS AND THIS

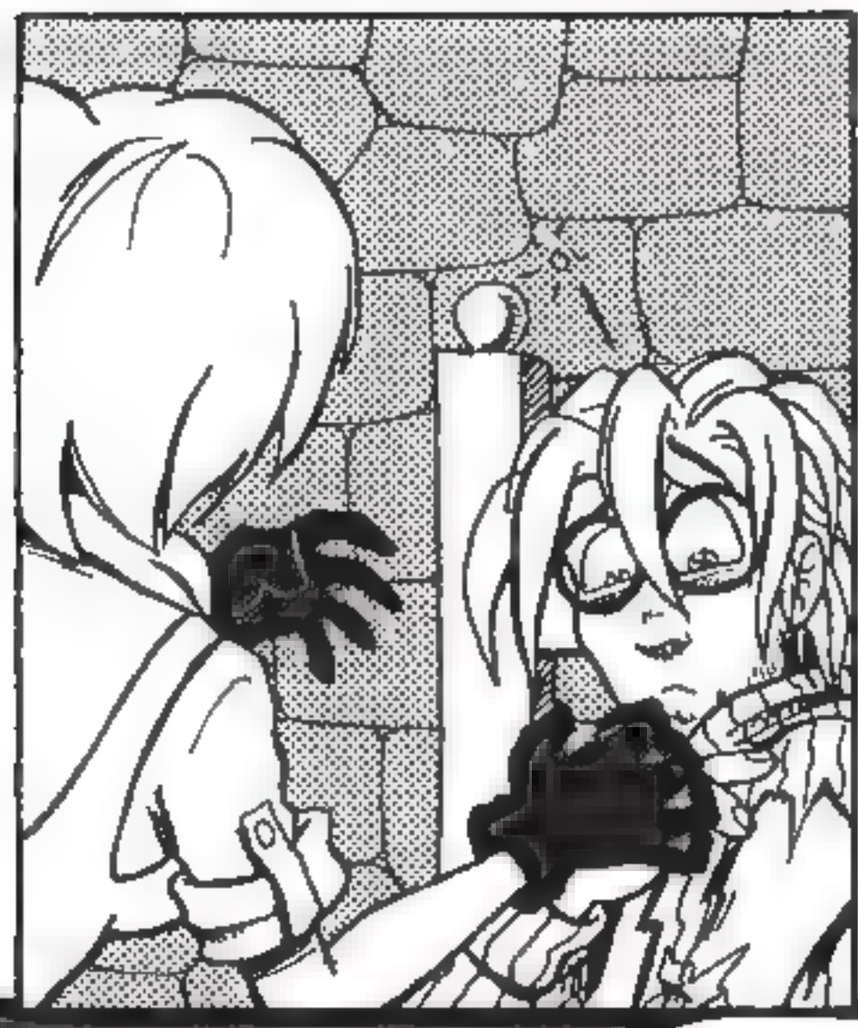
I'M NOT EVEN SLIGHTLY EXCITED!!!

SPUNG SPUNG SPUNG

Furniture. Wills. Swords. Dougal. Real estate... It's all spinning round in my head like Winnie Atwell playing the Black and White Rag on a hurdy-gurdy.

I've got a gut feeling I'm very close.

THIS IS BORING! IT'S SO BORING!!
YOU MUST BE SPONGED!
IT'S NOT HOLDING MY ATTENTION AT AHHH! GET OUT!! NILS!!
DON'T GET EXCITED.
GAH!!
SNATCH
SPLOK!
RIGHT.
I DIDN'T MEAN....
YOU-ME-THIS SPONGE-NOW!
NILS!!
NO-NO-NO! OW!
RRIP



NGAHH!!
NAB!

♪ JEREMY'S A PRUDE! ♪
NILS! I AM NEVER GOING TO FORGIVE YOU!! NILS!!

DEATH TO THE FRIGID HAGGIS!!!

OW!
THUD

STOP IT! I'M NOT!
PROVE IT!!
DON'T YOU DARE!

So 'g' is a fish. I should have known.

Sherlock Holmes liked to say that once you've eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. I think he was full of shit.

I also think the ice cream message is a trap. I'm on my way now to the freezer section of the local 7-11, but I'm not going alone.

Nine hours later no-one had shown. It's possible I was being set up - but it was worth it for the look on that skateboarder's face.

DROP IT, PLEASE?
LET GO YOU BASTARD!
I'M BEING REASONABLE, NILS. PUT THE DINOSAUR DOWN AND I'LL LET YOU UP.
DINOSAUR GONE.
OKAY.
NYAAARRH!
GNAB!

SAY IT!
SHWAK!

NILS IS A BULLY!

SAY IT PROPERLY.
DONK!

NILS IS A BIG BULLY!

DONK!

SAY "NILS IS ALWAYS RIGHT AND I AM A MORON."
NEVER!

DONK!

SAY "NILS-"
SUCKS!

DONK!

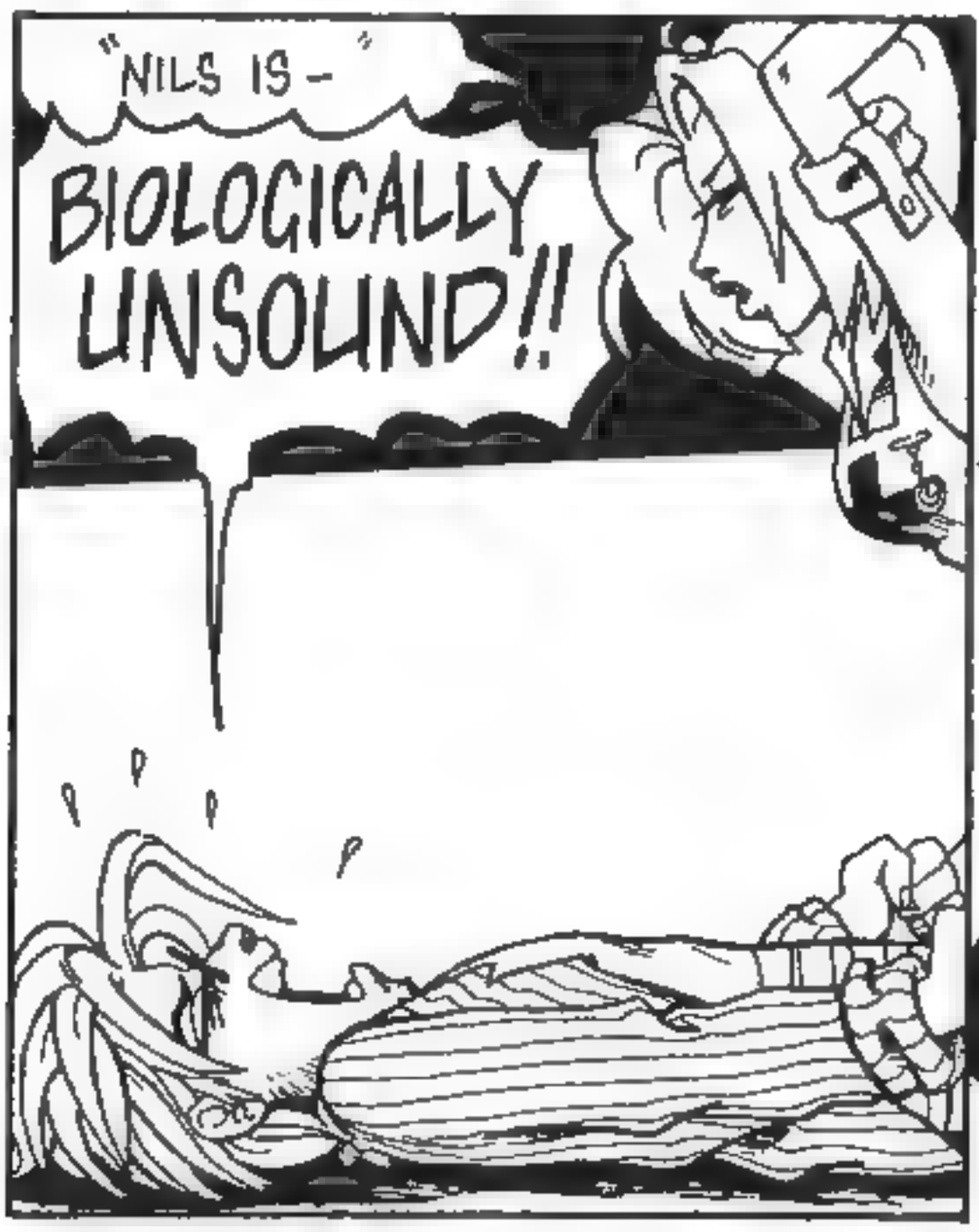
SAY "NILS IS FABULOUS AND GORGEOUS AND GOD-LIKE IN ALL HER CORRECTNESS!"

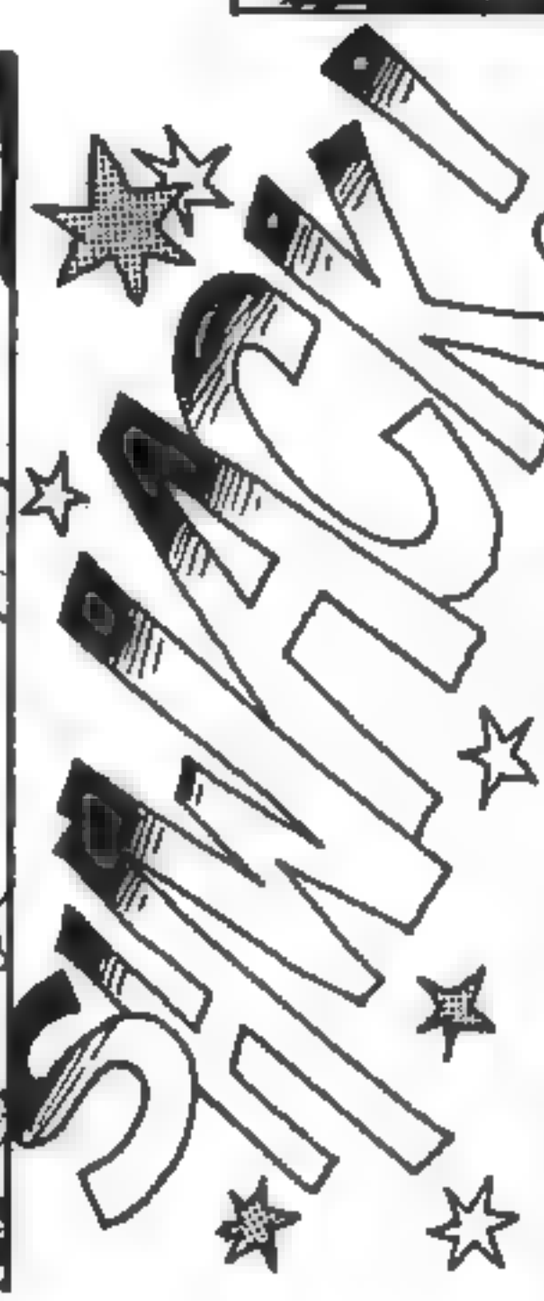
LIES! ALL LIES!!

DONK!
DONK!
DONK!

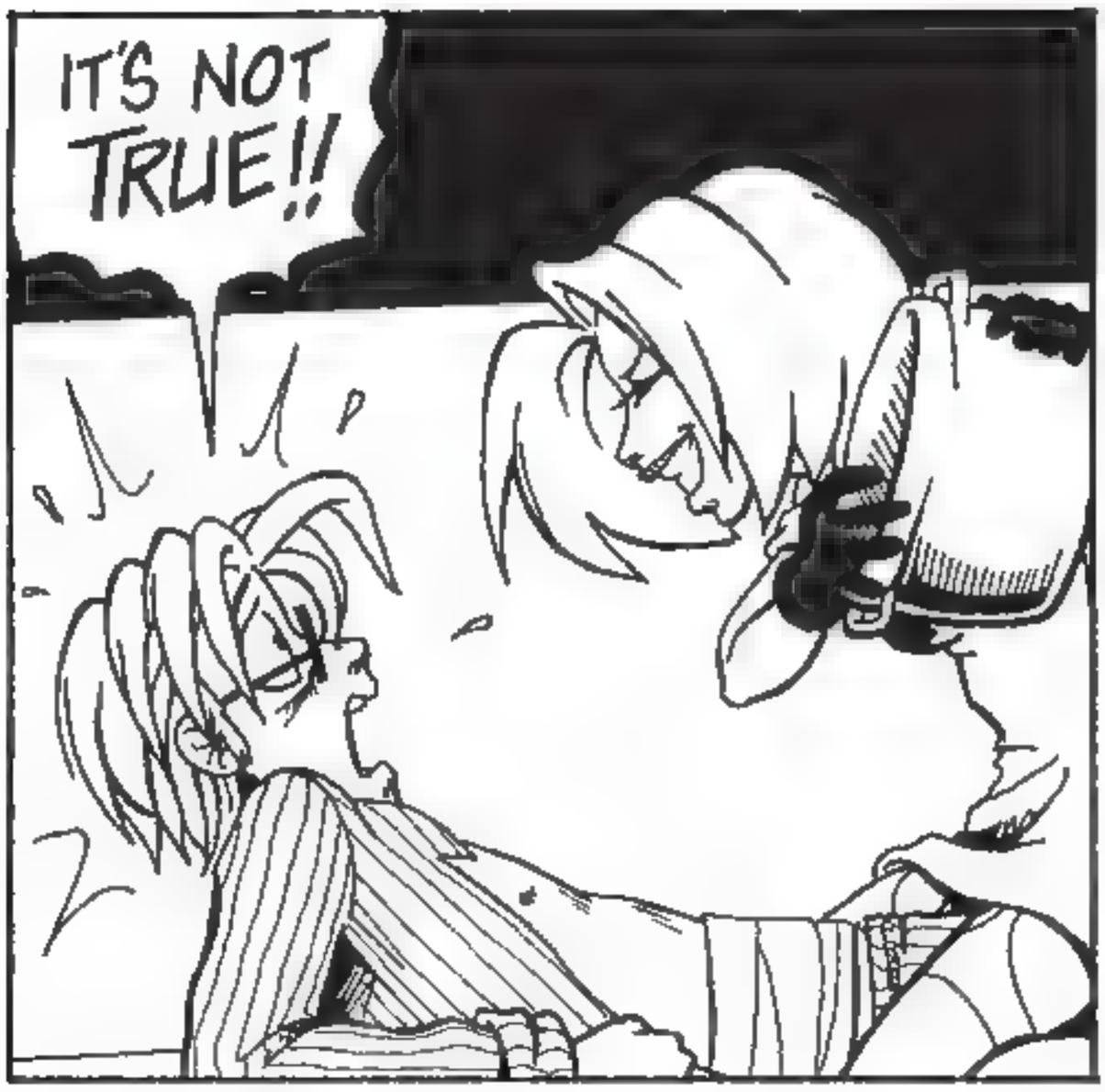
NILS IS THE DEVIL!

DONK!
DONK!
DONK!


"NILS IS -"
BIOLOGICALLY UNSOUND!!


SMACK!

OW!
SAY "NILS IS LEGEND AND I FANTASISE ABOUT BEING HER SEX SLAVE."



Wednesday. The blood on the piano matches Pumpkinhead. Could he be Dougal? Why the trench with furniture? What's a white Swahili woman doing in tartan?

And when is Nilson going to make her move? Do I have to do everything myself?

NI - OH GOD -
PING
TOO SLOW!
THUD!!
NILS??
WHOMMPH
NILS....
WHOMMPH!
NI ....

WHOMPH!

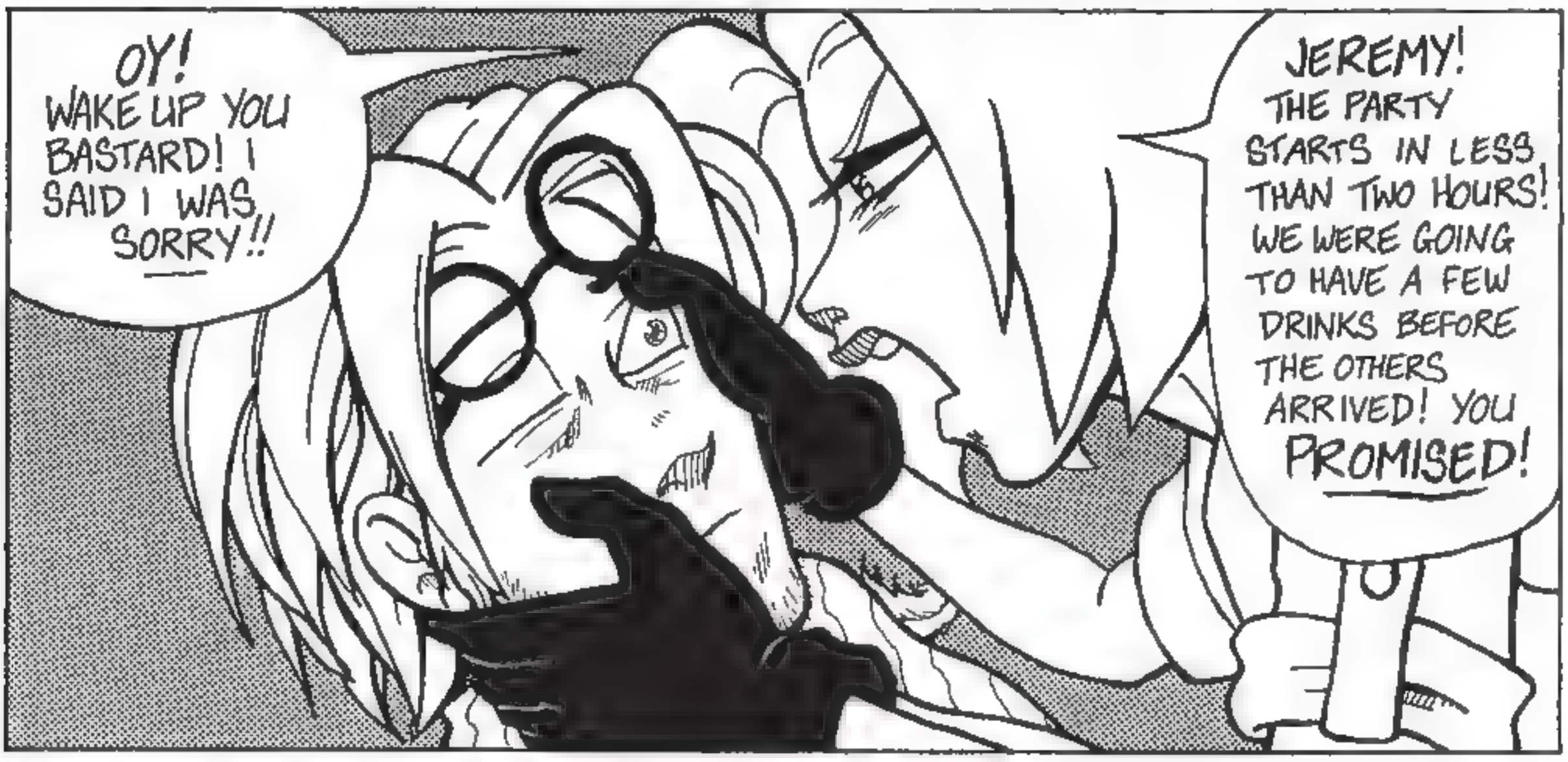
Nuh....

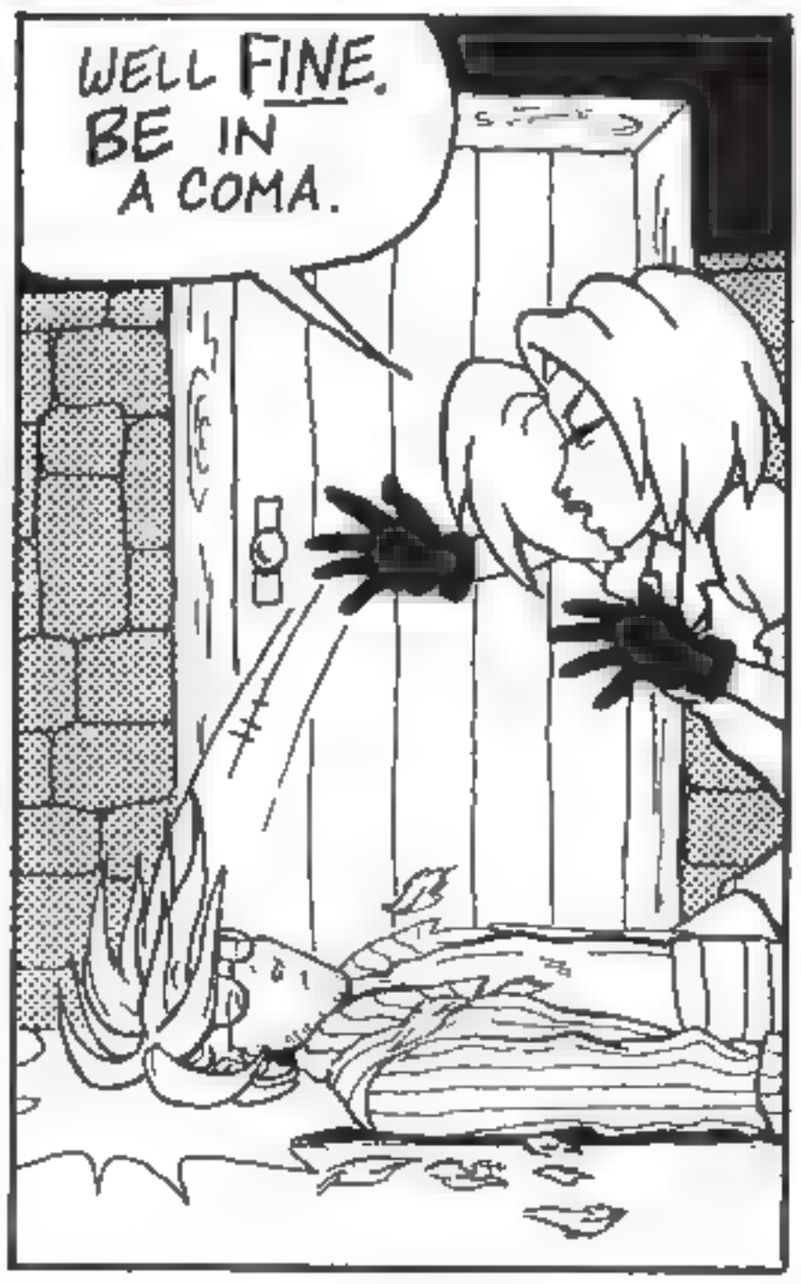
WHOMPH!

JEREMY?

OOPS! SORRY! JER? JEREMY? I'M SORRY. C'MON-UPSIE DAISY! JER!

DON'T DO THIS, JER! I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS HURTING AGAIN!

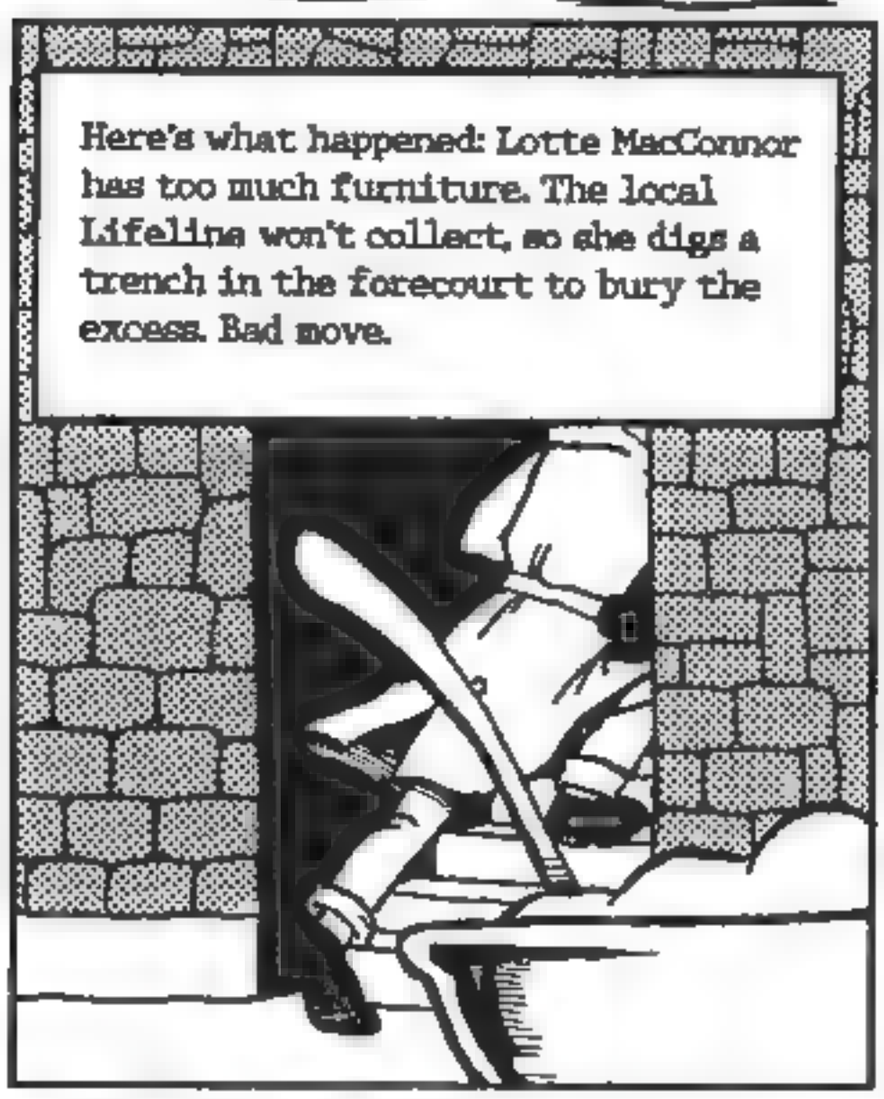

OY! WAKE UP YOU BASTARD! I SAID I WAS SORRY!!
JEREMY! THE PARTY STARTS IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS! WE WERE GOING TO HAVE A FEW DRINKS BEFORE THE OTHERS ARRIVED! YOU PROMISED!

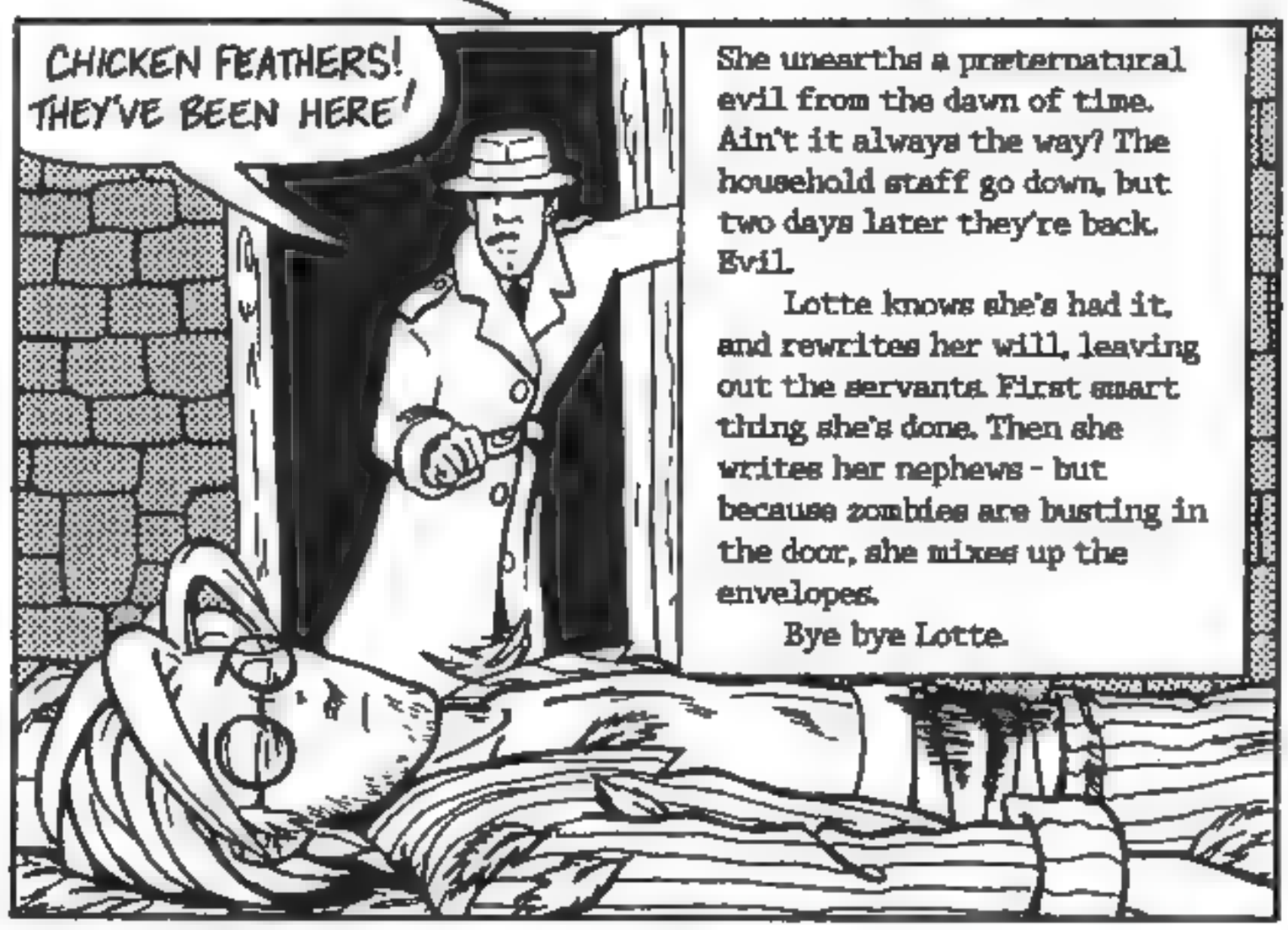

WELL FINE. BE IN A COMA.

I'M GOING TO GET READY. THEN, CONSCIOUS OR NOT, YOU'RE GETTING READY.

Friday. 5:21 pm.
Over the last of the ice cream I started thinking about what cemeteries are for. They're for putting dead people in.
And suddenly everything fell into place.

Here's what happened: Lotte MacConnor has too much furniture. The local Lifeline won't collect, so she digs a trench in the forecourt to bury the excess. Bad move.





She unearths a preternatural evil from the dawn of time. Ain't it always the way? The household staff go down, but two days later they're back. Evil.
Lotte knows she's had it, and rewrites her will, leaving out the servants. First smart thing she's done. Then she writes her nephews - but because zombies are busting in the door, she mixes up the envelopes.
Bye bye Lotte.

Assuming he's inherited, Dougal arrives and gets a piano lesson he'll never forget from the zombies, who then build themselves a graveyard to rise up out of when Jeremy arrives.

He does; they do. Holed up in the castle, Jeremy calls in his old friend the Swahili voodoo expert, who isn't from Zanzibar but Haiti.

Forced to fall back, the zombies find the will and realise that unless they kill Jeremy slowly then the castle goes to Dougal -

BLACKENED PIG - FAT.

And he's not going to be doing them any favours when he wakes up dead.

Then Nilson goes bughouse from the stress - and opens the castle door.

Jeremy's stabbed in the stomach and left to go slow.

But thanks to the neighbourly instincts of yours truly, Squash-noggin Dougal is on a bus to Algester before he can reanimate and inherit.

Tough break. Now he's doomed to wander the outer suburbs forever, his only reward a few sweeties each October.

Looks like I saved the day before I even took the [redacted]

Voodoo Woman'll keep the deadsiders at bay now. Their only real chance was to adopt Jeremy after he died. But they didn't count on my three years fighting the Haitian underground in Minnesota.

Which just about covers everything.

Except...

WHERE IS HE!? WHERE'S JACK LEADERBOARD!?

HE'S GONE, SWEETHEART.

NO!

GONE. HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING. WE OWE HIM MORE THAN WE CAN EVER HOPE TO REPAY.

YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT IN MY HEART I KNOW - ONE DAY HE'LL BE BACK.

THAT'S CRAZY TALK, SISTER!

AND HE'LL TAKE ME IN HIS STRONG, MANLY ARMS .....

EPILOGUE.

ALL RIGHT! LOOKIN SHARP, JER!

WHA-??

BODY-PAINT NEVER EVEN OCCURRED TO ME!

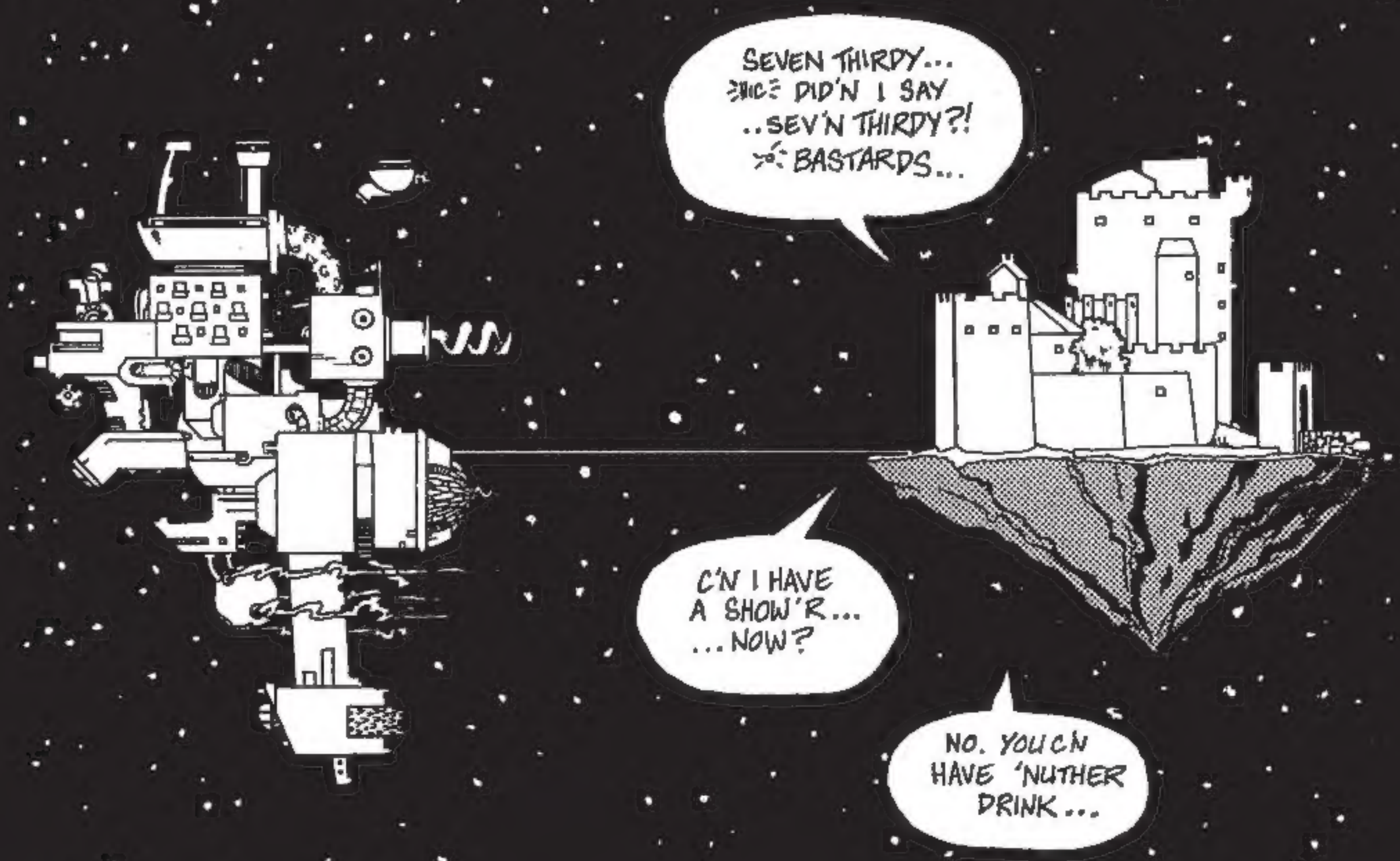
COME ON - WE'VE STILL GOT TIME FOR A FEW DRINKS BEFORE EVERYONE GETS HERE.

I'M NOT GOING OUT LIKE THIS!

WELL I'M NOT LETTING YOU GO TO ALL THAT TROUBLE JUST TO WASH IT OFF.....

IT'S THE RIGHT ADDRESS...

I WAS EXPECTING SOMETHING TALLER.

JEREMY? NILS?

RAOUL?